

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Before The
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

Localism Task Force

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FCC Docket RM-10803

**WRITTEN COMMENTS OF
CITIZENS MEDIA CORPS AND
THE COMMONWEALTH BROADBAND COLLABORATIVE**

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Identification Of Commenters

These comments are submitted by the Stephen Provizer, on behalf of Citizens Media Corps(CMC) and the Commonwealth Broadband Collaborative (CBC) in support of the Petition For Rulemaking, filed by Fred Baumgartner, P.B.E. of Colorado, that would establish Low Power Radio on the AM Band. CMC and the CBC, both based in Massachusetts, are comprised of public access television and radio stations and community technology centers (etc's). These organizations are concerned with public participation in media, the free-flow of information and other media reform issues.

CMC and CBC are strong supporters of the Low Power FM(LPFM) service and regret that LPFM is not usable in many urban or even suburban areas of the country. We believe that a low power AM system may be able to partially redress this problem and may also provide new options in parts of the country where LPFM frequencies are also available.

A Window of Opportunity

It is important to put consideration of LPAM into context, i.e., that at this point in radio history, a much smaller percentage of stations is locally owned than in the past. We realize that the relationship between diversity of programming and ownership is controversial, but we hold the view that ensuring diversity and localism of ownership should be a prime consideration in any Agency deliberation. No matter the strength of your feelings on this issue, however, it is difficult to believe that the Agency would not want to seriously consider this opportunity to shift the balance toward localism. Utilizing the Expanded AM band solely for the purpose of allowing the growth of more full power stations would squander that chance, as ownership of such stations is beyond the reach of all but the most well-financed. On the other hand, by fostering the growth of lower power stations, with a circumscribed coverage area, the Agency would be providing the conditions wherein pockets of localism would be allowed to flourish.

A fortunate confluence of events has opened up a window that can allow for the creation of this service: An engineering consensus led to the opening of frequencies above 1600 khz; there were ample receivers equipped to receive signals in that area of the band and finally, the migration of stations into the Expanded Band has proceeded slowly, with few stations licensed in that area. There may be several reasons for this, but whatever one may think these reasons are, we feel that it would not be inconsistent with the careful Ex-Band approach being taken by the Agency that consideration of this band as home of an LPAM service now be given.

Technical Points

First of all, we believe that any objective examination will reveal spaces in the Expanded Band for new day-time AM stations; especially low power stations.

The chief technical problem facing any new AM licensing scheme is potential nighttime skywave interference to and from distant stations. As a strictly local service, it is evident that all technical efforts can be utilized to keep skywave to a minimum, but more specifically, how can this service be approached so that night-time operation can occur?

There are a tremendous number of local and technical variables at play. Variations in local geo-physical conditions such as hills, ground conductivity and local RF conditions make it difficult to draft technical specifications about antenna length, polarization, grounding, capacitance hats, coils, etc. and the relationship between those parameters and power levels. Mr.

Baumgartner's petition takes engineering precedent based on the current licensing scheme into consideration and draws on a few generalized scenarios to make the case for LPAM feasibility. This petition is broadly drawn and represents a compromise position on this very complicated issue. It is not likely to convince either skeptics or proponents of LPAM, but let us acknowledge that no new radio service has ever sprung full-blown from the pen of a petitioner.

The purpose of our comments is not to address these technical questions with great specificity, but to ask that the Baumgartner petition be used as a foundation to initiate a conversation around the question: *How can a usable grade can be made available within an approximate 5-mile radius for a day and nighttime AM service.*

The single most important factor in deciding to undertake to answer this complicated question is *will*. Will this kind of service make a contribution to the radio landscape? Secondly, there must be an initial recognition that such a service is technically feasible. We strongly believe that, if the Agency demonstrates the will, the technical way can be found and we will be glad to add our voices to the technical record once this proceeding is underway.

Commercial or Non-Commercial Service

There exists both non-profit entities and unaffiliated independent individuals who could make significant contributions to the radio landscape if given entree through this service and neither group should be given an *a priori* advantage in the licensing process. The author of these comments was in favor of local control in the case of LPFM and still believes this should be the case. That is, in the case of contested licenses, criteria of localism should be applied, but no extra points should be given to non-profit applicants over individual owners who wish to run commercial stations. Local criteria should be prioritized in this fashion: local news and public and cultural affairs content to get first consideration; unique foreign-language content; single ownership in a market; live hosts. No licensing criteria should be applied to types of music formatted.

Finally, if LPAM is to reach its optimum potential as a local service, we feel it is imperative that it be designated as a Primary, not a Secondary Service. In a real world scenario, it is difficult to imagine that absolutely no interference will be generated by or caused to distant stations. But in that same real world scenario, we often find local full-power AM stations making only minimal efforts to control splatter and spurious harmonics on the dial. There is no reason why LPAM's should not be protected from sloppy engineering in the local market, and, in fact, would be doing the public a service by being the "canary in the birdcage" that would monitor problems and instigate action against those who are causing them.

Summary

There are many people who believe that the kind of process which led to LPFM will never be undertaken again; that the Agency must now focus its efforts on digital technology. We too are interested in implementing new tools to help radio fulfill its destiny as a democratic medium. Smart antennas, software-defined receivers and other new technologies can serve in this way. However, it is evident that the radio industry is far away from implementing this kind of technology. This service will not impede that implementation. The internet provides a useful analogue: many Americans do not have internet access and while most do, most of those do not have a broadband connection and still use older technology-56K modems-to access the internet.

Internet radio and satellite radio still only attract a fairly small percentage of radio listeners and the effectiveness and reach of "Digital Radio" (IBOC) is, as of yet, undetermined. Content will continue to be sought by millions of listeners of analogue terrestrial radio for some time and LPAM is a service that could prove enormously useful to this large audience.

The Expanded AM band represents a rare opportunity to provide this content; space exists and the engineering is feasible. Mr. Baumgartner's petition is to be highly commended for its usefulness in initiating a discussion that we hope will lead to a low power AM service.

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Commonwealth Broadband Collaborative, whose members include: the **College of Public and Community Service**, and the **Community Media and Technology Program** at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, the **CTC VISTA Project**, and the **Adult Literacy Resource Center**, also at UMass/Boston; **Boston Neighborhood Network**, **Allston-Brighton Free Radio**, **Codman Square Health Center's Technology Center**, **Cambridge Community Television**, **Somerville Community Access Television**, **Malden Access Television**, the **Lowell Telecommunications Corporation**, **South End Technology Center** and the **Timothy Smith Network**.and two regional/national associations, the **Community Technology Centers' Network (CTCNet)**, and the **Northeast Region of the Alliance for Community Media**.

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